



The Broken Playground



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Chapter 1 by Becky

"Higher, higher!" I scream in delight, my short legs pumping even harder as I try in vain to reach an altitude that would allow the breeze to kiss my face. The sunlight shines through the gaps in the trees, leaving dappled patterns across the playground. The birds twitter and chirp happily, teasing the pesky, mischievous squirrels as they dart about, fluttering just out of reach. I want to fly like a bird; to touch the playful sunshine and laugh with the leaves. My fingertips hesitantly loosen their grip on the swing set chains.

"Mommy, catch me!" I yell, my voice filled with laughter. But the giggle catches in my throat when I realize that there is nobody, no one there, and I am falling, falling, falling,

Chapter 2 by Paradox



I slam onto the ground and my knees hurt. A sob tries to burst forth from my throat but I refuse to let it. Pulling myself to my feet, I slowly turn a complete circle. "Mommy?" I ask the air, my voice barely audible. I sniffle. "Mommy?" I ask again, this time louder. "Where are you?"

A little brown bird chirps to my right and hops away. I take a step in that direction, and as I do, a cloud covers the sun. "Mommy, I'm scared. Come back!" I call, but she doesn't answer me. The

wind picks up and I feel a tear run slowly, crookedly down my cheek.

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I don't understand it, she was there only a few seconds ago. What could she have gone? I look around at the nearby bushes. "Mommy, I'm scared. Come back!" I call, but she doesn't answer me. The wind picks up and I feel a tear run slowly, crookedly down my cheek. I look around at the nearby bushes. "Mommy, I'm scared. Come back!" I call, but she doesn't answer me. The wind picks up and I feel a tear run slowly, crookedly down my cheek. I look around at the nearby bushes. "Mommy, I'm scared. Come back!" I call, but she doesn't answer me. The wind picks up and I feel a tear run slowly, crookedly down my cheek.

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facing the swings, the park is silent. The birds have gone, and the squirrels are no longer playing on the ground. The grass blows in the wind, and the chains of the swings creek eerily. I let the tears fall down my face, and try one more time. "Mommy!" I shout. But there is nothing.

I begin to run around the perimeter of the park, looking behind trees and sobbing. Mommy isn't here. I collapse to the ground beside the swing, shaking. I stare at mommy's footprints in the sand from where she had been pushing me. My backpack is still lying there.

The sky brightens again and I feel the warmth of the sun fall across my face. Birds begin to chirp again, but mommy still isn't here. I put my head on my knees. "Mommy..." I whisper.

It feels like I am there forever, the birds chirping around me and the sun warming my hair, when I hear footsteps. "Mommy!" I exclaim with glee, looking around. But it isn't her. It's a young man, and he looks flustered. His dark grey trench coat flaps gently around his body, and his hands are stuffed deep into his pockets. He comes towards me.

"Are you alright?" He asks. His voice is soft and gentle. Do I talk to him? Mommy said I shouldn't ever talk to strangers, especially not in this new town, but Mommy isn't here anymore. I need help and he seems nice. Slowly, I shake my head, and I begin to cry harder than ever. He looks alarmed.

"Shh, it's OK. Tell me what happened?" he says, crouching down next to me.

"I....I was playing with mommy on the swings....I....She's gone, she just disappeared. Where is she?" I sob. The man takes a deep breath and brushes his curly dark hair out of his face.

"What's your name?" he asks. Every so often, he looks furtively around us. He seems to be scared of something....he doesn't want to be here.

"Lilliana..." I whisper.

"That's a very pretty name." He says, and smiles. "I'm Etienne. I know you're scared, but I can't

just leave you here alone. You've probably been told you can't go places with strangers, but we need to take you somewhere safe. See more of Story Wars
mommy is missing. It'll work out, I promise."

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I look at him. Should I go with him? What if my mommy is still here? He seems to be reading my mind, and places his hand on mine. "Your mommy isn't here anymore, she wouldn't scare you like this." he says. "I know what you're feeling right now, honest."

"How?" I query. "And why are you so nervous?"

He sighs and his warm hand trembles a little bit. "When I was a little boy, the same thing happened to me, Lilliana. Right here in this park. I'm going to help you as best I can, but I need you to come with me." I think I see his eyes start to water, but he quickly blinks it away.

I take a deep breath, nod, and stand up. He picks up my backpack and holds his right hand out to me. I take it, and we walk through the grass to the dirt road. The birds chirp behind us, and I sniffle. "Will I see her again?" I ask Etienne. He doesn't reply right away, and when he does, his voice is quiet.

"I don't know. This playground isn't right, Lilliana....kids should be here laughing and playing, but they're not. Its like its broken. You and I aren't the only ones this has happened to...." He stops talking.

Tears fall silently down my cheeks. He squeezes my hand and quickens his pace. I don't turn to look behind us, despite the urge.

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